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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5390  
INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1426  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1249  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL  
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL//OLE/OI//

UNCLAS PORT AU PRINCE 000344

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR  
DRL  
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR  
INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)  
TREASURY FOR MAUREEN WAFER

E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: CARNIVAL A SMASH SUCCESS

¶1. Haitians on February 21 concluded a Carnival celebration exponentially larger and more festive than any seen in recent years. Local media estimates spectators to have numbered nearly 1 million in Port-au-Prince (roughly one third of the city's population) over the three- day celebration. The festivities included roughly 4,500 organized participants including bands, floats, and costumed formations. In a marked contrast to recent years, both the government, which budgeted roughly \$2 million, and the private sector, which spent at least that amount, jointly committed time, money, and effort to the success of the event. MINUSTAH received the brunt of the traditional satirical criticism, and carnival officials awarded the prize for the winning song to an entry entitled "MINUSTAH vole kabrit" (MINUSTAH steals goats) that poked fun at MINUSTAH's alleged lack of performance and neglect/abuse of Haiti's poor. The unofficial highlight of the event was President Preval's apparently spontaneous rush from his reviewing stand to the iron fence of the national palace, where he hung onto the bars and danced animatedly as his favorite band passed by -- a scene subsequently highlighted on news broadcasts.

¶2. Media reports and observers also highlighted the performance of the Haitian National Police (HNP) and government organizers, which mostly kept the crowds to designated areas and kept the parade to its planned route. Celebrations over the three days began in the afternoon and finished in the early hours of the morning. The final parade on Tuesday, February 20 concluded at 0600 the following morning: Embassy officers on the way to work hours later observed a veritable army of cleanup workers (many USAID funded) efficiently clearing the debris from downtown. The media report unconfirmed numbers of roughly 700 injured and three killed (reportedly from knifings) during the celebration, historically very low figures by Haitian standards. Smaller organized celebrations also took place in Les Cayes, Gonaives, and St. Marc.

¶3. Comment. Going back to 2004, when Carnival fell two weeks prior to former President Aristide's resignation, Carnival has been a desultory affair, variously boycotted by the private sector and drawing small crowds because of concerns regarding security and general disorganization. Many Haitians are taking the success of this year's event as a promising signal that conditions in the country are beginning

to improve. We do not ascribe undue significance to the jibes directed at MINUSTAH: they fall squarely within the Carnival tradition of the lower classes taking aim at the most convenient target among the powers-that-be. Ironically, recent MINUSTAH successes -- post will report recent developments septel -- in clamping down on crime had much to do with the success of this Carnival.

SANDERSON